



State Representative
Frank Chopp



43rd Legislative District

1998 Session News

Winter 1998

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Dear Friends and Neighbors:

The 1998 session holds several challenges for Washington's future. Legislation concerning a multitude of issues could affect you. Will energy deregulation increase your electric bill by \$200/year, as one study estimates? How affordable will Washington's Basic Health Plan insurance be for working people, trying to make ends meet in their family budget? Will our schools continue to receive less state funding each year, losing to inflation? If there will be tax cuts, will working families receive their fair share — after 80% of the \$1.4 billion in tax cuts since 1994 have gone to business?

These challenges occur as our state is witnessing a strong economy. Amid such prosperity, we must recognize that it's everyday people who work hard to make Washington state's economy strong. This newsletter highlights a few of the issues in the state Legislature that will have an impact on the daily lives of Washington citizens.

This session will only last 60 days — it will go by quickly. If you have any concerns or input on legislation, please feel free to contact me or my legislative assistant, Nori Catabay at (360) 786-7920.

Frank Chopp
Rep. Frank Chopp

Our Schools

Despite our state's economic prosperity, state funding for schools continues to decline, losing to inflation. Washington state is spending \$261 less per student per year, compared to 1993 (adjusted for inflation). That's \$7,000 less for an average classroom! That means less money to buy basic supplies, as well as other cutbacks. Ms. Thompson, a teacher at B.F. Day Elementary School in Fremont said it best, "Teachers are digging into their own pockets, spending as much as \$1,000 a year to buy supplies. We ask parents to donate supplies like paper and pencils, but not every parent can afford that. With less dollars, we're making choices between reducing class sizes or purchasing books and supplies."

The trend toward decreasing support for education must be reversed. I applaud Governor Locke's recent proposal calling for a volunteer reading corps. The Governor is proposing a \$28 million tutoring program, which would utilize 25,000 volunteers to work with 82,000 children in second to fifth grades.

I also believe we must reduce class size. Washington's classrooms are among the most crowded in the nation. Only three states are more crowded! I also support legislation which would: 1) provide full-day kindergarten; 2) help students meet the new academic standards in math, reading, and other subjects; and 3) enable classroom teachers to take better advantage of new technology.

I'll continue to work to make higher education more available and affordable.



Ms. Donna Thompson, teacher at B.F. Day Elementary, Seattle's oldest continuously running school, with her students

(photo by John Pai)

What the Legislature Does or Does Not Do, Affects Us All.

Our Commute

Seattle is now the sixth most traffic-congested city in the nation. Overall in Washington state, traffic has doubled in the last 15 years. And the trend is for more growth — as more than 100,000 people enter our state each year.

Despite its budget surplus, the state has decreased transportation funding. In fact, the current transportation budget is \$152 million less than the 1995-1997 budget. That means that maintenance of existing roads will fall further behind. No major new construction is funded

this biennium and reduced funds have forced delays in existing projects.

Ultimately, we must increase funding and expand transportation alternatives. Gradually, plans of the Regional Transit Authority (now called Sound Transit) will be phased in, linking mass transit options in Central Puget Sound, including Everett, Bellevue, Seattle and Tacoma. In past legislative sessions, I worked hard to defend the RTA. This system of expanded regional bus service, commuter rail, a starter light rail system and better connec-

tions, is scheduled to be completed over the next decade. When completed, Sound Transit will create capacity equal to a 12-lane highway. Other proposed solutions include more car pool lanes, separation of rail track and road lines so freight can be moved faster, passenger-only ferries and more.

Meanwhile, we cannot procrastinate too long. Traffic tie-ups mean increased air pollution, more accidents, and more travel time. The direct impact of traffic on Puget Sound residents is estimated at \$1.3 billion each year in lost productivity and wasted fuel.

Of equal importance is dealing with the negative impacts of highways. I recently attended a N.O.I.S.E (Neighborhoods Opposed to Interstate Sound Exposure) meeting. Many homes and businesses in the Eastlake, North Capitol Hill, Roanoke, Portage Bay, and Montlake areas are affected by the noise pollution caused by Interstate 5. Representative Ed Murray, Senator Pat Thibodeau and I are working with members of this coalition to address issues of noise pollution and other environmental hazards. I will introduce legislation that would allow more funds to be used for noise mitigation and other such problems.



Interstate-5 Bridge

(photo by John Pai)

Our Wages and Benefits

Not all are sharing in the fruits of our good economy. Many Washington employers don't provide their workers with livable wages, or basic benefits. I support legislation to raise Washington's minimum wage (now the lowest on the West Coast) to \$6.50 an hour by 2000. That would enable a family of three, headed by an adult working full-time at minimum wage, to rise

above the poverty level for the first time in many, many years.

Benefits for part-time workers is also becoming a major issue -- as last year's UPS strike demonstrated. If part-time employees are doing the same work as their full-time counterparts, shouldn't they have the same benefits -- on a pro rata basis? I believe so. I actively support legislation addressing this inequity.

I also support strengthening families through the extension of

family leave benefits. I will co-sponsor proposals which allow workers time to attend school conferences or medical emergencies.

We also need a fairer tax system. Only 20% of the \$1.4 billion in tax cuts approved over the past three years benefitted working people, with 80% going to corporations. I believe working families and seniors should share in our state's economic prosperity. Any further tax relief in 1998 must be simple, fair, and equal.

Report from State Representative Frank Chopp

Our Electric Bills

We in Washington state enjoy the nation's cheapest, cleanest power. But major business interests from out of state have been pushing for rapid deregulation of our state's electrical energy system. Under deregulation, you would choose your power company much like you now choose long distance companies. Proponents claim energy rates would drop. But opponents of deregulation point to a Department of Energy study that forecasts Northwest rates would rise 30%. Under deregulation, the largest industries and out-of-state buyers could get the cheapest rates by buying in bulk. Small businesses and residential customers would be left paying higher prices.

There are other risks to deregulation. Utilities could be tempted to increase the amount of power considered "surplus," to sell outside our region. When profit becomes more of the driving force, will energy companies continue to pay for things consumers consider important, such as assistance to low-income energy consumers, restoring salmon runs hurt by hydro dams, and weatherization programs for the elderly and poor? As deregulation talks proceed, I'll continue to seek protections for Washington's consumers.



Electric utility line worker.



Linda McVeigh, Director of the Country Doctor Community Clinic.

(photo by John Pai)

Our Health

I am committed to increasing the state's Basic Health Plan (BHP), which provides affordable health insurance to low-income working people. At the Country Doctor Community Clinic on Capitol Hill, patients know that having insurance such as the BHP can mean the difference between life and death. "No parent should have to make a decision about whether to take a sick child to the emergency room because of the cost," says Country Doctor Community Clinic Director Linda McVeigh.

Despite the worthiness of the BHP, the majority party has made it less accessible for those it was primarily meant to help: the working poor. Early this year, rates went up for 150,000 of Washington's workers. In some cases, insurance premiums increased over 50%.

Meanwhile, the promise by the majority party to expand BHP coverage to more low-income families has gone unfulfilled. Instead, there are 65,000 people on the waiting list for the Basic Health Plan.

Another health care goal this session: requiring that insurance companies provide fuller coverage for women's health concerns, including maternity care and contraceptives.

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What do you think?

Due to its prosperous economy, Washington state is projecting a large budget "reserve" by June 1999.

What would you do with this money?

(check your first choice)

- ☐ **1** Save it for the future — place it in the state's reserve fund.
- ☐ **2** Invest it in schools.
- ☐ **3** Spend it on transportation.
- ☐ **4** Expand the Basic Health Plan.
- ☐ **5** Cut taxes by reducing the motor vehicle excise tax or other.
- ☐ **6** Comments: _____

Please cut along the dotted line, fold the questionnaire and return it. Thank you!

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